

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 17, 2009.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Madam President, following leader remarks, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to concur with respect to H.R. 3326, the Defense Appropriations Act. The first hour will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees. The Republicans will control the first 30 minutes and the majority will control the next 30 minutes. I filed cloture on the motion to concur. That vote will occur sometime in the next 10 or 12 hours.

PASSAGE OF CRITICAL LEGISLATION

Mr. REID. Madam President, we are going to finish this health care bill before we leave for the holidays.

For nearly an entire year, we have reached out to the other side, offered Republicans a seat at the table, tried to negotiate in good faith—nearly a whole year. Now we are closer than ever to fixing a badly broken system and doing more to make sure every American can afford to live a healthier life than this country has done in decades.

The Republicans have made their point. Through obstruction manuals, admissions that they believe stalling is good for electoral politics, and gambits like the one we saw yesterday; that is, forcing the full, hours-long reading of

an amendment they did not like, and then complaining when that amendment they did not like was withdrawn, they have made their point to the American people. They have made it perfectly clear they have no interest in cooperating or legislating.

But the families and businesses who are suffering, hurting, and dying every single day have no time for these kinds of games. That is why we are going to finish health care whether the other side cooperates or not.

But health care is not the only critical issue this body faces. It is not the only critical issue to this country or before this body. Right now we have to complete a bill that supports the fighting men and women of this country, whether they are in Iraq, Afghanistan, Korea, Japan—all those many bases where tens of thousands of people are stationed. It is as simple as that.

Here are some of the good things in the bill that is now before the Senate, the message from the House. It funds more than \$100 billion for operations, maintenance, and military personnel requirements for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Part of that money will also support preparations to continue withdrawal from Iraq. There is more than \$23 billion for the equipment used by our servicemembers in Iraq and Afghanistan to do their jobs and stay safe. There is more than \$150 billion to train our troops and prepare them for battle. There is more than \$30 billion for the health care of our servicemembers, their families, and their children. It also gives our brave and valiant troops a pay raise of 3.4 percent this year.

This is not a partisan issue. Yesterday, this bill passed the House 395 to 34. More than 90 percent of Democrats voted for this bill. More than 90 percent of Republicans in the House of Representatives voted for this bill. That is because they know to our fighting men and women—these brave Americans half a world away, a lot of them—who wage two wars on our behalf, it is immaterial whether the leaders who will give them all the resources they need to succeed are progressives or conservatives. Surely, our troops who are on deployment after deployment after deployment spend more time counting the days until they can see their loved ones again than they do counting the political points scored by either side. They do not care most of the time, Madam President. They just do their jobs.

The House proved as much yesterday. The Senate should do the same today. We received this bill yesterday at 2 p.m. Are we going to wait until tomorrow to pass it? This simply is not right. Let's give our troops what they need to succeed, and do it now. Then let's get back to giving all Americans what they need to stay healthy.

These two bills—these two pieces of legislation—are about life and death. Our responsibility is too great to waste time playing political games.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, Senators on both sides acknowledge that the health care bill we are considering is among the most significant pieces of legislation any of us will ever consider—I think, I would argue, the most significant piece of legislation certainly in my time here. So it stands to reason we would devote significant time and attention to it.

Indeed, some would argue we should spend more time and attention on this bill than most—if not every—previous bills we have considered.

The majority, obviously, disagrees. Why? Because this bill has become a political nightmare—a literal political nightmare to them—as evidenced by more and more public opinion polls, including the Wall Street Journal/NBC poll out this morning. They know Americans are overwhelmingly opposed to it, so they want to get it over with as quickly as possible.

Americans are already outraged at the fact that Democratic leaders took their eyes off the ball, rushing the process on a partisan line that makes the situation even worse.

Americans were told the purpose of reform was to reduce the cost of health care. Instead, Democratic leaders produced a \$2.5 trillion, 2,074-page monstrosity that vastly expands government, raises taxes, raises premiums, and wrecks Medicare. And they want to rush this bill through by Christmas? They want to rush this bill through by Christmas that does all of these destructive things. One of the most significant, far-reaching pieces of legislation in U.S. history, and they want to rush it.

Here is the most outrageous part. At the end of this rush, they want us to vote on a bill that no one outside the majority leader's conference room has seen yet. No one has seen it. That is right. The final bill we vote on is not even the one we have had on the floor of the Senate. It is the deal Democratic leaders have been trying to work out in private. That is what they intend to bring to the Senate floor and force a vote on before Christmas.

So this entire process is essentially a charade. But let's just compare the process so far with previous legislation for a little perspective.

Here is a snapshot of what we have done and where we stand on this bill.

The majority leader intends to bring this debate to a close as early as this weekend—4 days from now—on this \$2.5 trillion mistake. No American who has not been invited into the majority leader's conference room knows what will be in the bill.

The bill has been the pending business of the Senate since last November—less than 4 weeks ago—but we